



ROCKY MOUNTAIN COLLEGE

Film and Politics
“Terrorism, Revolution, and the Irish Question”

Course Syllabus:
Spring 2012

POL 225
W 6:00-9:15
Morledge-Kimball 119

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Course Description:

The primary purpose of this course is to introduce students to the genre of political film, with the explicit goal of learning how to treat such films as “texts.” The massive growth of the film industry during the 20th century allows us the opportunity to examine in critical detail the portrayals of political issues through this visual medium. But to do so will require substantially more than simply “watching movies”; several handouts will serve as contextual frameworks for analysis, and will force students to think in thematic terms and focus on issues such as plot, character development, setting, representation of reality, and political world-view.

The theme of this iteration of POL225 is “Terrorism, Revolution, and the Irish Question”; throughout the semester, together we will view 14 films on these subjects, in an effort to develop a comprehensive and comparative understanding of these highly complex and highly charged issues. By doing so the complexities of our collective and cultural conceptions of political violence can be illuminated and dealt with in a more sophisticated manner than that which our conventional discourse promotes.

In addition, we will also consider the politics of filmmaking itself – that is, the often politically-charged motivations behind the executive-level decisions which determine what kind of films are funded (and to what extent) and how and to whom they are marketed.

Finally, we will want to examine differences among and between films from different historical eras, and from different parts of the world, in an effort to foster both historical and cross-cultural understandings of the development of the genre.

Note: Unlike my other courses, this class is not reading intensive. However, there is a significant amount of writing required (50+ total pages over the course of the semester), and the nature of the course necessitates a mandatory attendance and participation policy.

Content Warning:

The films that we will watch throughout the semester will contain graphic violence, profane language, nudity, and the depiction of other disturbing situations which might make an individual student uncomfortable. If you believe that such content will upset you in any way, it is advised that you do not take this course.

Required Readings:

There are no required texts, but multiple readings will be handed out in class or can be obtained online, including:

O’Gara, “Terrorism as Revolution: Theorizing Clandestine Political Violence” (handout)

O’Gara, “Inequality and Political Violence in a Divided Society: Charismatic Movements in Northern Ireland” (handout)

Netflix:

Students are encouraged to subscribe to Netflix; students often like to watch portions of films a second time when composing their reviews and review essays, so a subscription to Netflix will allow you to do so (and I will not loan out my copies of these films). There are no books to be purchased for the course, so the Netflix fees may be well worth the cost.

Course Policies:

The first requirement of each student is to understand that this is an academic environment and as such it is necessary that there is a high degree of civility, respect for fellow students, and respect for the material. You are expected to do *all* assigned readings, and you must participate in class if you hope to earn a passing grade.

1. Missed Classes: This course covers a great deal of material and meets just once a week; therefore repeated absences will not be tolerated. Students are allowed one absence, regardless of circumstance. Subsequent absences will result in your course grade being rescaled down by 1/3; i.e. a student with four absences will have their final grade reduced 1 point on a 4.0 scale.
2. Missed Assignments: If you do not turn in a graded assignment your maximum grade in the course will be rescaled along a 90/80/70/60 scale; i.e. if you fail to hand in a paper worth 20 percent of your grade, your highest possible grade in the class will be a B, regardless of your average on a 4-point scale.
3. Late Papers: Papers will lose one full letter grade per class session late. No exceptions.
4. Plagiarism and Cheating: Neither will be tolerated, and if a student is caught doing either they will fail the course and I will recommend to the Dean of Students that said student be expelled from school.
5. Laptops: Laptops or the use of other electronic devices is not allowed in class. This includes e-readers, as I will not participate in the demise of the written word.
6. Email: Do not assume that I check my email every day and do not use email as a means of conversation. Email should be used only for quick, non-emergency questions and for setting up appointments for face-to-face meetings in my office.

Graded Assignments:

Weekly Film Reviews:

Each student is required to turn in a 2 page (12 pt. Times New Roman font, double spaced, with one-inch margins) typewritten review on the film viewed for each week. These are to be combined synopses and analyses of the topics from that session's readings (you will be given a detailed handout as a guide). Additionally, they should demonstrate your ability to connect each author's work to the overarching ideas expressed in the course description.

These assignments will be graded and collectively amount to 20 percent of your final grade in the course, so careful viewing and note-taking are imperative. Also, because these assignments are intended to serve as facilitators for class discussion, film reviews are due the *Tuesday* following our viewing of each film, and must be turned in to the box in front of my office door by 4:00 pm. Late papers ***will not be accepted for any reason***. Students will be allowed one mulligan (missing review) for each section of the course; students who complete all reviews in each section will have their lowest score dropped.

At the end of the semester, all film reviews must be submitted to me electronically so that they can be run through our plagiarism software. To help manage this task, your files must be saved according to the following format: *lastname225review1.doc*, *lastname225review2.doc*, etc.

Review Essays:

Over the course of the semester we will be watching a total of 14 films – which we will treat as political texts. Each student is required to write an 8-10 page analysis on the films within each segment of the course. A handout will be distributed to help guide you, but in general these papers will have the broad goal of explaining the overarching messages and meanings of the films viewed, in a comparative manner and review-essay style.

While no outside research is required for these papers, you are advised to consult imdb.com as a reference for actor, director, and character names. Although I cannot prevent you from seeking out the reviews/analyses of other critics, my strong preference is for you to avoid doing so – so that what you write is a reflection of your own thoughts and interpretations, and is not influenced by other viewers or so-called “experts.” Additionally, please note the plagiarism policy stated in Course Policy 4.

Note: papers should be composed in 12 pt. Times New Roman font, double spaced, with normal one-inch margins and stapled. Papers will lose 1/3 of a grade if they exceed the stated limits, are not paginated properly, or are not stapled. Late papers will lose one full grade per day late.

Grading:

Papers will be graded on an A-F scale and will be averaged as follows:

Film Reviews:	20 percent
Review Essays:	30 percent each
Participation:	20 percent

Grading Criteria:

These are the standards I adhere to when I grade essays. Pluses and minuses represent shades of difference, as do split grades (e.g. B-/C+). Grades are based on the evidence of the essay submitted, not on effort or time spent.

A

Excellent in every way (this is not the same as perfect). This is an ambitious, perceptive essay that grapples with interesting, complex ideas; responds discerningly to counter-arguments; and explores well-chosen evidence revealingly. The analysis enhances, rather than underscores, the reader's and writer's knowledge (it doesn't simply repeat what has been taught). There is a context for all the ideas; someone outside the class would be enriched, not confused, by reading the essay. Its introduction opens up, rather than flatly announces, its thesis. Its conclusion is something more than a summary. The language is clean, precise, often elegant. The reader should feel enlightened and educated for having read the paper. There's something new in your analysis, something perhaps only you could have written and explored, in this particular way. The writer's stake in the material is obvious.

B

A piece of writing that reaches high and achieves many of its aims. The ideas are solid and progressively explored but some thin patches require more analysis and/or some stray thoughts don't fit in. The language is generally clear and precise but occasionally not. The evidence is relevant, but there may be too little; the context for the evidence may not be sufficiently explored, so that I have to make some of the connections that the writer should have made clear for me. This is a solid essay whose reasoning and argument may nonetheless be rather routine (the limitation is largely conceptual).

C

A piece of writing that has real problems in one of these areas: conception (there's at least one main idea but it is fuzzy and difficult to understand); structure (non-linear development of your ideas); use of textual evidence (weak or non-existent -- the connections among the ideas and the evidence are not made and/or are presented without context, or are simple platitudes and generalizations); language (the sentences are often awkward, dependent on unexplained abstractions, sometimes contradict each other). The essay may not move forward but rather may repeat its main points, or it may touch upon many (and apparently unrelated) ideas without exploring any of them in sufficient depth and without a developmental flow. Punctuation, spelling, grammar, paragraphing, and transitions may be a problem.
-or- an essay that is largely plot summary or "interpretive summary" of the text, but is written without major problems.
-or- an essay that is chiefly a personal reaction to something. Well-written, but scant intellectual content -- mostly opinion.

D and F

These are efforts that are wildly shorter than they ought to be to grapple seriously with ideas.
-or- those that are extremely problematic in many of the areas mentioned above: aims, structure, use of evidence, language, etc.;
-or- those that do not come close to addressing the expectations of the essay assignment.

Participation:

The majority of class time will be devoted to discussion of the assigned readings. Discussion can include (but is not limited to) an analysis and/or critique of the author's position, a comparison of the assigned work to another text, or debate as to the meaning or merit of a given work (or particular points therein).

Class participation is evaluated on quality rather than quantity. Comments need not mirror the position of the author (or the professor). You are graded not on the "correctness" of your position, but rather on your analysis of the material and your ability to articulate your ideas. You don't have to be at the center of every debate, but students who make little or no effort to enter discussions will receive a lower participation grade. Discussion will become lively, heated even. Always respect the positions of others. When you disagree with someone, be sure to criticize the *idea* and not the person.

Participation will be graded according to the following criteria:

A

The student in this grade range arrives in class each day thoroughly prepared with comments and questions on the assigned reading. Comments reveal that the student has read carefully; this student occasionally initiates the discussion without waiting for the professor to do so. This student does not, however, try to dominate the class, but listens carefully to the remarks made by fellow class members, and responds as readily to these as to the instructor's questions.

B

The student in this grade range participates in most discussions, although not as fully or reliably as the student described above. There is evidence of having done the reading. This student pays attention to the comments of the other students.

C

The student in this grade range participates only intermittently, and is more willing to discuss broad, general questions than to engage in concrete analysis of an assigned text. Sometimes unprepared, this student lacks interest in the ideas of other members of the class, neglects to bring the proper text to class, and is often inattentive.

D or F

The student in this grade range seldom if ever participates.

Things that lower your participation grade:

- * Not paying attention in class
- * A ringing cellphone
- * Talking to your neighbor or holding conversations separate from the class discussion
- * A student who is seen using their phone for text messaging will receive an F as their final participation grade

NOTE: Unlike paper grades, participation will *not* be given plus/minus or split grades, and your final grade is weighted in a manner such as to make it impossible for you to receive an A for the course if your participation grade is not an A.

Semester Schedule:

Week 1:

1/11

Introduction and Course Outline

Film 1: *The Battle of Algiers* (Gillo Pontecorvo, 1966)

Week 2:

1/18

O’Gara, “Terrorism as Revolution: Theorizing Clandestine Political Violence” (handout)

Film 2: *The War Within* (Joseph Castelo, 2005)

Week 3:

1/25

Film 3: *This is England* (Shane Meadows, 2006)

Week 4:

2/1

Film 4: *The Baader Meinhof Complex* (Uli Edel, 2008)

Week 5:

2/8

Film 5: *The Weather Underground* (Bill Siegel, Sam Green, 2002)

Week 6:

2/15

Film 6: *The Cost of Freedom* (Christopher Wright, 2004)

Week 7:

2/22

REVIEW ESSAY 1 DUE

Week 8:

2/29

O’Gara, “Inequality and Political Violence in a Divided Society: Charismatic Movements in Northern Ireland” (handout)
Film 7: *Bloody Sunday* (Paul Greengrass, 2002)

Week 9:

3/7

Film 8: *Behind the Mask: The IRA and Sinn Fein* (PBS/Frontline, 1997)

Week 10:

3/14

Film 9: *Some Mother’s Son* (Terry George, 1997)

Week 11:

3/21

Film 10: *In the Name of the Father* (Jim Sheridan, 1993)

Week 12:

3/28

Film 11: *Hidden Agenda* (Ken Loach, 1990)

Week 13:

4/4

Film 12: *Omagh* (Pete Travis, 2004)

Week 14:

4/11

Film 13: *Five Minutes of Heaven* (Oliver Hirschbiegel, 2009)

Week 15:

4/18

Film 14: *Eureka Street*, parts 1 & 2 (Adrian Shergold, 1999)

Week 16:

4/25

Film 14: *Eureka Street*, parts 3 & 4 (Adrian Shergold, 1999)

5/2

REVIEW ESSAY 2 DUE